



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE DISCOVERY OF YUCATAN IN 1517 BY FRANCISCO HERNÁNDEZ DE CÓRDOBA

By MARSHALL H. SAVILLE

It has been justly stated by H. H. Bancroft that "prior to 1517 almost every province of the eastern continental seaboard, from Labrador to Patagonia, had been uncovered, save those of the Mexican gulf, which casketed wonders greater than them all. This little niche alone remained wrapped in aboriginal obscurity, although less than forty leagues of strait separated the proximate points of Cuba and Yucatan."<sup>1</sup>

It seems certain that the Gulf of Honduras was first discovered by Columbus, on his fourth and last voyage in 1502. On this voyage he reached the so-called Guanaja Islands off the Honduras coast and from there went eastward, skirting the Central American coast to Panama. We shall not enter into the discussion of the question raised by Oviedo, who denies this discovery of Columbus and writes that "the gulf of Higueras [Honduras] was discovered by the pilots Vicente Yañez Pinçon, Juan Díaz de Solís, and Pedro de Ledesma with three caravels."<sup>2</sup> It seems apparent that Pinçon and Solís visited this region in 1508, after the news of the voyage of Columbus had been made public, and they probably saw the eastern shores of Yucatan on this trip. The date of the voyage is disputed, but we believe the year 1508, as given by Ferdinand Columbus,<sup>3</sup> to be the right one, although Winsor<sup>4</sup> and Bancroft<sup>5</sup> incline to the date 1506, following Herrera, who has taken for his authority Las Casas, who does not mention, however, the exact year. Las Casas states that there was a

---

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Bancroft: *History of Mexico*, Vol. 1, 1516-1521, San Francisco, 1883; reference in Ch. 1, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> G. F. de Oviedo y Valdes: *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, edition of the Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 1852; reference in Vol. 2, Bk. 21, Ch. 8, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Colón: *Historia del Almirante Don Cristóbal Colón*, edition of Colección de Libros Raros 6 Curiosos, vi, Madrid, 1892, Vol. 2, Ch. 89, pp. 145-146. In this connection the reader is referred to the study by Dr. P. J. J. Valentini entitled "Pinzon-Solis 1508," in *Zeitschr. Gesell. für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, Vol. 33, 1898, pp. 254-282. In his "The Portuguese in the Back of Columbus" (*Bull. Amer. Geogr. Soc.*, Vol. 20, 1888, pp. 432-444; Vol. 21, 1889, pages 35-56, 167-196, 359-379) Valentini advances the argument that, immediately after the return of Columbus from his first voyage, the King of Portugal secretly sent a fleet of four vessels to the islands found by the discoverer in 1493. They reached the coast of Yucatan, and as a result of their explorations drew up a chart showing the result of their discoveries on the three sides of the peninsula. A map of 1501 has been used by Valentini to analyze the place names of the Portuguese survey of the Yucatan coast, two of the most significant being Conillo, identified by Valentini as Cozumello, and Kimpech, the Campeche of today. Valentini goes so far as to write, "the Portuguese in the year 1493 were the first, and Pinzon-Solis the second, discoverers of Yucatan."

<sup>4</sup> Justin Winsor, in his "Narrative and Critical History of America," Vol. 2, p. 191, writes: "It should be remembered that Columbus on his fourth voyage had sailed along the coast from Cape Honduras to Nombre de Dios, and that Vicente Yañez Pinzon and Juan Díaz de Solís, coasting the shores of the Gulf of Honduras, had sailed within sight of Yucatan in 1506; and therefore that in 1508 the coast line was well known from the Cabo de S. Augustin to Honduras."

<sup>5</sup> Bancroft, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 12.

disagreement about this voyage among the witnesses, some saying that after they reached the Guanajas and had discovered the Golfo Dulce, they followed the coast from the Guanajas, and soon discovered a great bay to which they gave the name the great bay of Navidad, and from there they [went and] discovered the mountains of Caria and other lands beyond; and, according to what other witnesses say, they returned to the north. And from all this it seems without doubt that they discovered then a great part of the kingdom of Yucatan, only that afterwards there was no one who followed up that discovery, [and] nothing more was surmised of the edifices of that kingdom, where the land and grandeur of the kingdom of New Spain might easily have been discovered, until it was discovered from Cuba.<sup>6</sup>

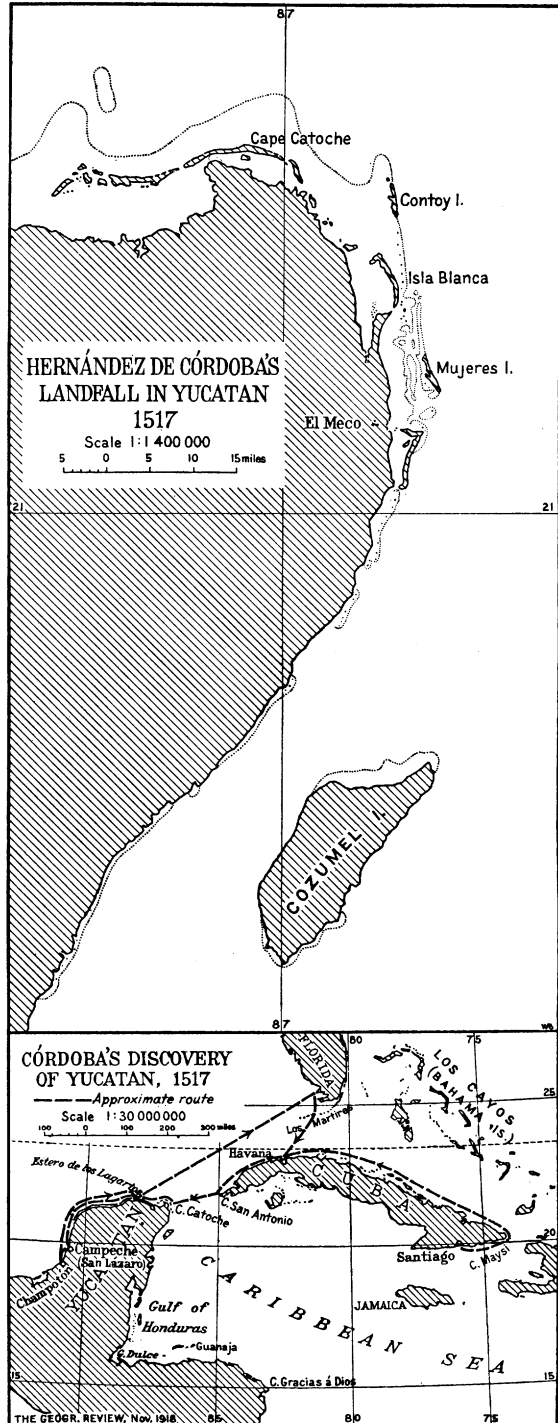
### The Discovery of Yucatan

The credit for the real discovery of Yucatan must be awarded to Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, who sailed from Cuba in

<sup>6</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas: *Historia de las Indias*, edition of Fuensanta del Valle and Sancho Rayon, Madrid, 1875, Vol. 3, Ch. 39, p. 201.

FIG. 1 (Upper)—The present coastline of the northeastern point of Yucatan to illustrate the site of Córdoba's landfall. Scale, 1:1,400,000. Based on U.S. Hydrographic Office Chart No. 966.

(Lower)—Córdoba's route (conjectural) on his voyage of discovery of Yucatan, 1517. Scale, 1:30,000,000. Based on sources cited in footnotes 18 and 37.



1517 on a slave-raiding expedition<sup>7</sup> and came to the northeastern point, where the Spaniards first came into contact with the ancient civilized people of Mexico and saw the stone buildings of the Mayas. From Cape Catoche Córdoba went around the peninsula as far as the present state of Campeche, and then he probably returned to Cuba by way of southern Florida (see Fig. 1).

#### ACCOUNTS OF THE EARLY WRITERS

The first printed account of Córdoba's discoveries is found in the fourth "Decade" of Peter Martyr, in Latin, piratically printed under the title "De Nuper Sub D. Caroli Insulis" in Basel in 1521.<sup>8</sup> Then follow the long account in Oviedo, first printed in Seville in 1535, and the work of Gomara, first published in Zaragoza in 1552. The only description of this voyage which we possess written by one of the participants is that of Bernal Díaz del Castillo. It was not written until he was an old man, nearly fifty years after the events described had taken place, and was not printed until 1632. Meanwhile much had been written about the discovery and conquest of Mexico. The best modern account in English of Córdoba's expedition has been compiled by Bancroft in the first volume of his "History of Mexico." It is accompanied by references to nearly all of the original source material which has come to light. An excellent treatment of the subject is also found in the fourth volume of the scholarly "Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de México,"<sup>9</sup> by the learned Mexican historian and geographer Manuel Orozco y Berra. The accounts of Prescott,<sup>10</sup> Winsor,<sup>11</sup> and Fiske<sup>12</sup> are meager in comparison. Since the appearance of these works another early chronicle of New Spain has been brought to light, that of Cervantes de Salazar, which contains some details not found elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> As a background for the narratives of the voyage of discovery of Juan de Grijalva in 1518, who followed up the discoveries of Córdoba, we have translated literally and give *in extenso* some of the statements of the early writers concerning motives underlying the despatch of the expedition under the leadership of Córdoba.

<sup>7</sup> Justin Winsor writes that Velásquez, the Governor of Cuba, had distributed the slaves in that island to such an extent among his followers that the majority of the settlers were unable to get any slaves, "and in this predicament agreed with Francisco de Córdoba to go on a slave-raiding expedition to some neighboring islands." Bancroft notes that "opinion has been divided as to the original purpose of the expedition. As it turned out, it was thought best on all sides to say nothing of the inhuman and unlawful intention of capturing Indians for slaves . . . It seems clear to my mind that slaves were the first object and that discovery was secondary and an after-thought." In the light of the various testimonies which are quoted hereafter, it will be seen that Bancroft's conclusion is justified.

<sup>8</sup> The fourth "Decade" of Peter Martyr, published in 1521, has been translated into English several times.

<sup>9</sup> The "Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de México" was published in Mexico in four volumes in 1880. The account of the voyages of Córdoba, Grijalva, and Cortés will be found in Vol. 4.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Prescott: Conquest of Mexico, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, Ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Winsor: Narrative and Critical History of America, 8 vols., Boston and New York, 1884-89.

<sup>12</sup> John Fiske: The Discovery of America, 2 vols., Boston and New York, 1892.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that Francisco Cervantes de Salazar had written a history of New Spain was known, but the whereabouts of the manuscript, if indeed it had been preserved, was unknown until the end of 1911, when it was seen by Mrs. Zelia Nuttall in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Mrs. Nuttall communicated

## LAS CASAS

We quote first from Las Casas, who writes that the expedition was formed

to go to attack the Indians wherever they might be found, or in the Lucayos islands, although they were already destroyed, as has been seen above; still, they thought that some hidden away might be met with, by chance [there], or in other parts of those discovered [islands].

After describing the preparations made to send out the ships, he relates that, while they were being provisioned in a port called Principe on the northern coast of Cuba,

the pilot Alaminos said to the captain Francisco Hernández de Córdoba that it seemed to him that in that sea to the west below the island [of Cuba]—and his heart led him to believe so—there should be very rich land, because when he went with the old admiral [Columbus], he being a boy, saw that the admiral was much inclined to navigate towards that part, with great hope that he should find [there] well-peopled land and very much richer than up to there [Honduras], and thus he affirmed it; and because he lacked the ships he did not proceed on that route, and he turned from the cape he called Gracias á Dios back of the province of Veragua. This said, Francisco Hernández, who was [a man] of great hopes and good spirits, assented to these words and determined to send to Diego de Velásquez for permission, so that, although they should go to attack Indians and bring them to that island [of Cuba], in case on their journey they should discover any new land, he would go with authority as lieutenant of the governor, who governed there for the King, which [permission] should be sent promptly, as Francisco Hernández who asked for it desired.<sup>14</sup>

The necessary permission was sent and they immediately set sail.

## CERVANTES DE SALAZAR

Further details are found in the recently discovered "Crónica de la Nueva España" by Cervantes de Salazar. He writes as follows:

Diego Velásquez being governor of Cuba, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, Cristóbal Morante, and Lope Ochoa de Caicedo, inhabitants of Cuba, fitted out three ships in the year 1516 [a mistake; the expedition sailed February 8, 1517]. Some say with the support of Diego Velásquez, who was very favorably disposed to carry on work of discovery; others say that it was at his expense. The end sought by the privateers, some say was to discover and trade (although it is more certain that it was for the purpose of bringing slaves from the islands of Guanaos near Honduras).

He goes on to give a different version of the reported conversation of the pilot Alaminos with Córdoba from that written by Las Casas. He states:

In this manner Francisco Hernández set out from the port of Santiago de Cuba, who,

---

her discovery to the Congress of Americanists at its session in London in 1912. It was published under the auspices of the Hispanic Society in a single volume in Madrid, 1914. After the meeting of the London congress the writer mentioned the subject of the finding of the manuscript to Francisco del Paso y Troncoso in Madrid. Señor Troncoso made the claim to the writer and Professor MacCurdy that he knew of the manuscript and had made a copy of it some time previous to the visit of Mrs. Nuttall to the Biblioteca Nacional. He published a part of the work under the title "Crónica de Nueva España escrita por el doctor y maestro Francisco de Salazar," Madrid, 1914, as Volume 1 of "Papeles de Nueva España compilados y publicados por Francisco del Paso y Troncoso." The second volume has not yet been published so far as the writer is aware. Señor Troncoso died a year and a half ago, and his literary effects have recently been sent to Mexico. There is a possibility that the second volume was printed and not issued.

<sup>14</sup> Las Casas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, Ch. 96, pp. 349-350.

when he was on the high sea, declared his intention was different from what it had seemed. He said to the pilot, "I am not going to hunt Lucayos [Lucayos are Indians of ransom], but I am going in search of some good island in order to settle it and become governor of it. I am certain therefore that for my services, as well as the favor I have at court through my kindred, the King will grant me the favor of the governing of it. For this reason search with great care, for which I will repay you very well, and you will gain in all the advantages with all the other of our company." The pilot accepting the promises and offers, they went more than forty days, ploughing the sea, and did not find anything that seemed good. One night at midnight, the ship having fair weather, the sea calm, the moon shining, the people sleeping, and the pilot wrapped up in a cloak, he heard the sound of wavelets against the sides of the caravel, and knew that he was near land. He called the chief pilot and told him to take soundings and see if he could find bottom.

They found twenty fathoms of water, and the chief pilot, Alaminos, went to Córdoba with the news saying,

"Señor, good news, for we are in the richest land of the Indies." The captain inquired, "How do you know it?" and he responded, "Because when I was a small cabin-boy of the ship in which the Admiral Colón went in search of this land, I had a little book that I had brought, in which it said that, encountering bottom in this direction in the manner in which we have found it, we should find a great land very thickly settled and very rich, with sumptuous buildings of stone in it, and this book I have now in my chest."<sup>15</sup>

#### AUTHOR OF "DE REBUS GESTIS CORTESII"

According to the author of the "De Rebus Gestis Ferdinandi Cortesii"

Seven years after the arrival of Velásquez and the Spaniards in Cuba, that is to say in 1517, the island being pacified, Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, Lope Ochoa de Salcedo, Cristóbal Morantes, old settlers in the island, and many other Spaniards renowned for their name and wealth, formed a company among themselves, and named Francisco Fernández de Córdoba as commandant of the expedition. They prepared four ships, loaded them with provisions and arms, and brought together men, arranging to leave on a fixed day in the direction of the Lucayas and Guanajas. The object was to capture by force or trickery those islanders, a people barbarous and wild, and to bring them to Cuba as slaves. These islands lie between the south of Cuba and the north of the cape of Honduras, as with little truth Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo has written. At the time of leaving, the Adelantado Velásquez gave to Córdoba and his companions a vessel, [one] of those which were used to carry provisions to the Indians of the mines, under the condition that he would be given a part of the Guanajas [Indians] who would be captured. After the ships had left and were distant from the port, there came up very strong and contrary wind, so that in place of arriving at the Guanajas, which was where they were going, they came to stop at the point of Mujeres.<sup>16</sup>

The Lucayas are the Bahama Islands to the northeast of Cuba, where Columbus made his first landfall. The Guanajas, as has been said, were discovered by Columbus in 1502, and are off the coast of Honduras, almost due south of the extreme western end of Cuba. Being in diametrically

<sup>15</sup> Cervantes de Salazar, *op. cit.*, Bk. 2, Ch. 1, pp. 59-60.

<sup>16</sup> The "De Rebus Gestis Ferdinandi Cortesii," written in Latin, probably by Juan Cristóbal Calvert de Estrella, between the years 1548 and 1560, was translated into Spanish under the title, "Vida de Cortés" and the Latin text with the Spanish translation was first published by the translator, Joaquín García Icazbalceta, in Vol. 1 of his "Colección de Documentos para la Historia de México," in 1858. Prescott made use of a copy of the original manuscript. Reference on pp. 558-559.

opposite directions from the island from which they set out, it would seem more probable that the expedition must have been intended for the Guanaja group. Furthermore, accounts agree that, after leaving Jaruco, near the present Havana, they sailed westward and rounded Cape San Antonio. Had they intended sailing to the Bahamas, they would not have sailed from Santiago de Cuba around to the north side of the island as far west as Havana and then gone still farther westward to the extreme end of Cuba. Leaving Santiago and rounding the eastern Cape Maisi, their course would have been due north, for the Bahama group is not far distant in this direction. Prescott makes the assertion that the expedition was bound to "one of the neighboring Bahama Islands,"<sup>17</sup> basing his opinion apparently on the loose statement in the "De Rebus Gestis" just quoted.

#### BERNAL DÍAZ

Bernal Díaz, the only eyewitness of the expedition, states that the motive for the voyage was "in seeking and exploring new lands where we might find employment." He goes on to say that one of the vessels was "bought on credit from the Governor Diego Velásquez, on the condition that all of us soldiers should go in the three vessels to some islands lying between Cuba and Honduras which are called the Islands of Guanajas and make war on the natives and load the vessels with Indians, as slaves, with which to pay him for his bark." This proposition was refused, and the Governor fell in with their plan "to go and discover new countries." After the fleet left Cuba, on passing Cape San Antonio, a storm struck them which lasted two days and nights, and after the weather moderated, sailing for twenty-one days from the time they had left port, they sighted land "that had never been discovered before and no report of it had reached us."<sup>18</sup>

#### FIRST LETTER OF CORTÉS

A final statement regarding the motives for the trip is found in the so-called "First Letter" of Cortés, written from Vera Cruz in 1519. In it are mentioned the names of the three promoters of the expedition and that "these said persons sent two ships and a brigantine in order to fetch Indians from those islands" and "we believe, although we do not know it positively, that the said Diego Velásquez, Lieutenant of the Admiral, owned a fourth part of the fleet."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Prescott, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, Ch. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The original manuscript of the History of Bernal Díaz still exists in the Municipal Archives of Guatemala City, where the writer has had the great privilege of examining it. The first edition of 1632, from which later editions and translations have been made, is exceedingly faulty. An "autograph" edition was edited by Genaro García and printed in Mexico in 1904, from a photographic facsimile of the original manuscript presented by the President of Guatemala to the Mexican Government. From this first exact publication of Bernal Díaz, Alfred P. Maudslay has made a faithful translation, greatly enriched by notes, which gain added value from the fact that he has personally visited a greater part of the territory treated in the History. It has been published by the Hakluyt Society in five volumes (*Hakluyt Soc. Publs.*, 2nd Series, Vols. 23-25, 30, and 40, London, 1908-1916).

<sup>19</sup> The first letter despatched by Cortés to the King of Spain, relating his adventures in 1518 from the time of his landing at Cozumel until he arrived off the coast of Yucatan, has been lost. Its place has been

## TREATMENT OF CÓRDOBA BY VELÁSQUEZ

Authorities vary as to the number of days spent on the outward voyage: Las Casas states it as only four, Oviedo gives six, while, as has been seen, Bernal Díaz makes it twenty-one, in which he is followed by Herrera. Las Casas, who was a friend of Córdoba, does not mention the return of the expedition by way of Florida, as related by Bernal Díaz. He gives some interesting information concerning the shabby treatment received by Córdoba from Velásquez, when, animated by the sight of the gold objects brought back by the expedition, he began to fit out another expedition to return to Yucatan, under the leadership of his nephew, Juan de Grijalva. At the same time we must remember that Córdoba had been sorely wounded in a fight with the Indians and was hardly in a condition to set out again for the newly found lands. In fact he died within two weeks after reaching his home. How much his disappointment had to do with his early demise we do not know. He himself did not realize his serious condition, as will be seen by what Las Casas writes. He says:

This appointment grieved Francisco Hernández very much, and he received it as a great affront that Diego Velásquez had done it, because he had with his own money, if it was indeed his, made the fleet, with that of the other two, Cristóbal Morante and Lope Ochoa, establishing and making the discovery, and being placed in so many dangers by sea and land, and in the end coming out badly wounded. The enterprise, then, was his very own and apart from him pertained to no one. For which reason he determined to go to complain to the King about Diego Velásquez, and he wrote to me to this effect, I being then in Zaragoza, saying that Diego Velásquez had tyrannically defrauded him of the fruits of his labors and that he would not delay more than to be cured of his wounds, and to receive some funds for the expense, begging me that I would inform the King in the meantime of his affront. But he disposed to go to Spain, and God disposed to carry him to the other world. . . Finally, with this innocence like many others, our friend Francisco Hernández died.<sup>20</sup>

## The Landfall of Córdoba

## DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Regarding the place of the landfall of Córdoba the early writers are not at all in accord. Stephens writes regarding the first landing place that "navigators and geographers, however, have assigned different localities to this memorable point, and its true position is, perhaps, uncertain."<sup>21</sup> It is the generally accepted idea that the landing was made on the island of Mujeres, and Mr. S. G. Morley, who coasted the peninsula in 1918, saw a small monument on the island erected by the Mexican Government in 1917 to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Mexican territory by Europeans.

---

supplied by the letter sent by the newly established municipality of the town of Vera Cruz, founded by the Conqueror after his landing there. It contains a short account of the two previous expeditions as an introduction. It has been translated at least twice into English. We use the latest translation of Francis A. MacNutt, published in two volumes in New York, 1908; reference in Vol. 1, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> Las Casas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, pp. 362-363.

<sup>21</sup> J. L. Stephens: *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, New York, 1843, Vol. 2, p. 356.



## BERNAL DÍAZ

Nevertheless, the old chronicler Bernal Díaz states that they first came to land where "from the ships could be seen a large town standing back from the coast about two leagues . . . . We named it Grand Cairo." He goes on to say that the cacique who came in a canoe to visit the ships "kept on saying in his language '*Cones catoche*,' which means 'Come to my houses,' and for that reason we called the land Cape Catoche, and it is still so named on the charts." Díaz, describing the sharp fight which took place here between the Spaniards and the Indians, says, "A short distance ahead of the place where they attacked us was a small plaza with three small houses built of masonry, which served as *cues* and oratories. These houses contained many pottery idols, some with faces of demons and others with women's faces."<sup>22</sup> It is evident that this place was between the shore and the large town called Grand Cairo, but no mention is made of the name *Mujeres* being applied to any point in the immediate neighborhood. On the contrary, in describing the expedition of Cortés in 1519, Díaz writes that after leaving the island of Cozumel they came to the so-called bay between the island of *Mujeres* and the mainland, where they remained for a day and sent two boats to the shore; they found "farms and maize plantations, and some places where the Indians made salt, and there were four *cues*, which are the houses of their idols, and there were many idols in them, nearly all of them with figures of tall women, so that we called that place the Punta de *Mujeres*." This seems to identify clearly the island, and, so far as the testimony of Bernal Díaz is concerned, it is apparent that Córdoba did not go as far south as *Mujeres* on his voyage. The fact of finding women's figures and faces of pottery in both the vicinity of Cape Catoche and the island of *Mujeres* may have caused the confusion in the early accounts. Maudslay, in a footnote to his translation of Bernal Díaz, writes on this point that "Bernal Díaz says nothing about this locality [*Mujeres* Island] in his description of the two earlier voyages, but the author of the '*Itinerario*' says that Grijalva observed it after leaving Cozumel. As Grijalva could not possibly have had any information on the subject, it seems to show that the '*Itinerario*' was written at a later date than is usually assigned to it and gave this explanation to account for the name given to the locality by Cortés."<sup>23</sup> Cortés does not mention in his letter the landing at *Mujeres* alluded to by Bernal Díaz, but it is probable that they landed there, and there seems to be no reason why Grijalva should not have landed there, notwithstanding the silence on the subject of both Bernal Díaz and Juan Díaz, the author of the "*Itinerary*" of Grijalva, as Grijalva was at Cozumel, and *Mujeres* is between there and Cape Catoche.

<sup>22</sup> Bernal Díaz, *op. cit.*, Hakluyt Soc. edition, Vol. 1, pp. 14-17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

## OVIEDO AND HERRERA

In the letter of Cortés it is stated that Córdoba "arrived at the island of Yucatan at its uttermost point, which may be sixty or seventy leagues both from the said island of Fernandina, and from this rich land of Vera Cruz." Oviedo says that the expedition, after sailing some sixty or seventy leagues, came to the land of the province of Yucatan, "on the coast of which they saw low stone towers, which were mesquites or oratories of that idolatrous people. These edifices were placed on certain steps, and the towers were covered with thatched roofs."<sup>24</sup> Herrera's account is as follows: "They saw land at which they rejoiced much, and gave many thanks to God, and from the ships they saw a town that appeared to be two leagues from the coast . . . And an Indian said in a loud voice '*Conex catoche*,' that is to say 'Come to my houses,' and for this [reason] they gave the name Punta de Catoche to that point."<sup>25</sup> In his narrative of the voyage Herrera follows closely the story as told by Bernal Díaz. He describes the fight with the Indians and states that where it took place "there were three houses made of lime and stone that were oratories, with many clay idols with faces of demons, of women, and other bad figures." It will be noted that none of the writers cited—and they are our most trustworthy sources of information—give the island of Mujeres as the place of first landing of Córdoba, both Cortés and Oviedo being silent in the matter, and Bernal Díaz and Herrera being in accord in stating that the place was given the name of Cape Catoche.

## GOMARA

In the history of Gomara printed in 1552 we find the earliest definite published statement that the first land sighted was the island of Mujeres. He writes that the Spaniards first came to land where "there are some salt pits at a point called de las Mujeres, for there were there some stone towers with steps, and chapels covered with wood and straw, in which in pagan order were put many idols resembling women . . . . They did not stop there but went to another point that they called Catoche, where they saw some fishermen, who from fright or fear retired to land, and who responded '*Catoche, catoche*,' that is to say 'house,' thinking that [the Spaniards] asked where they were going. From this there remained the name of the cape of that land."<sup>26</sup> It is significant that Gomara says that the first place where the Spaniards landed was not at Mujeres but at Cape Catoche.

## "DE REBUS GESTIS CORTESII"

In the "De Rebus Gestis" we again find Mujeres mentioned as the first land seen by Córdoba. It is stated that after encountering a strong head

<sup>24</sup> Oviedo y Valdes, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, Bk. 17, Ch. 8, p. 497.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio de Herrera: *Historia de las Indias Occidentales*, edition of A. Gonzales Barcia, Madrid, 1726-1730, Decade 1, Bk. 2, Ch. 17, p. 47. The first edition was published in Madrid in 1601-15.

<sup>26</sup> F. L. de Gomara: *La Historia General de las Indias*, p. 68. I quote from the edition of Martin Nucio, printed in Antwerp in 1554.

wind the Spaniards "came to stop at the point of Mujeres. They gave it this name because they found many figures of women or goddesses placed in a row in a temple. The building was of stone . . . Córdoba leaving there placed his prow towards the west and sailed as far as Cape Catoche."<sup>27</sup> If Córdoba placed his prow towards the west it must have been from Cape Catoche, for, if sailing from Mujeres, the course would have been north-northwest.

#### CERVANTES DE SALAZAR

Cervantes de Salazar narrates that after leaving Cuba the expedition came into shallow water one night, and "at ten oclock in the morning with great joy they sighted land and came to the weather side of a small island that was called Cozumel on account of the great quantity of honey which was there."<sup>28</sup> He says that no landing was made there and makes the mistake of having the fleet come to anchor some thirty leagues up the coast towards Mexico in the "land of Lazaro." This stop was not made until after the fight in the vicinity of Grand Cairo described by both Bernal Díaz and Herrera, the land of Lazaro being in Campeche. Las Casas also makes the blunder of saying that "they arrived at a large island called Cozumel, to which the Spaniards gave the name Santa Maria de los Remedios."<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt whatsoever that Cozumel was not seen by Córdoba and was not discovered until the next year. Bernal Díaz says that the name Santa Cruz was given to the town discovered on Cozumel because they first entered it on the day of Santa Cruz. The chaplain Juan Díaz does not restrict the name to the town but writes: "and because the day was that of Santa Cruz we gave that name to the land."<sup>30</sup> The name Santa Maria de los Remedios was the name given to Yucatan when that land was still supposed to be an island and was never applied to Cozumel as stated by Las Casas.

With a single exception, all later writers on the subject have taken the authority of Gomara, Torquemada,<sup>31</sup> and others, and the island of Mujeres has been credited as being the spot where the first landing was made.

<sup>27</sup> Work cited in footnote 16, p. 559.

<sup>28</sup> Cervantes de Salazar, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Las Casas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, Ch. 96, p. 350.

<sup>30</sup> The "Itinerary" of Grijalva, written by the chaplain of the fleet, was published in Italian by Ludovico de Varthema in the work entitled "Itinerario de Ludovico de Varthema Bolognese ne lo Egypto, ne la Syria, ne la Arabia Deserta et Felice, ne la Persia, ne la India, et ne la Ethiopia, etc.", edition printed in Venice by Zorzi de Rusconi in 1520. It was translated into French by Ternaux Compans and published in Vol. 10 of his "Voyages, Relations et Mémoires Originaux Pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Découverte de l'Amérique," Paris, 1838. A translation into Spanish was published by Içazbalceta in his "Colección de Documentos para la Historia de México," Vol. 1, pp. 281-308, with parallel Italian text. This has been translated into English by the writer and will appear as Vol. 3 of the publications of the Cortés Society.

<sup>31</sup> Torquemada writes that Córdoba "discovered the land of Yucatan, a coast until then unknown and undiscovered by us Spaniards, where upon a headland there were some very large and good salt mines. It was called Las Mujeres, because there were stone towers, with steps, and chapels covered with wood and straw, in which many idols that appeared to be females were arranged in a very artificial order." I

## ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Archeological evidence should throw some light on the problem. The island of Mujeres is about five miles long, half a mile wide, and about five miles distant from the mainland (see Fig. 1). Steamers to Belize now pass close to the southern point of the island, with the small ruined temple at the extreme end of the point in full view. The ruins have been studied and described by Stephens,<sup>32</sup> the Le Plongeon,<sup>33</sup> and Holmes.<sup>34</sup> Stephen Salisbury in a note to an archeological communication made by Dr. Le Plongeon to the American Antiquarian Society in 1878 calls attention to "the remarkable agreement in the number of buildings mentioned by Herrera with the number found by Dr. Le Plongeon in a more or less ruined condition as shown in his plan."<sup>35</sup> In a later letter Le Plongeon writes: "You will see in my communication on the Isla Mujeres that I have found the three houses made of stone and lime that were the oratories of Herrera."<sup>36</sup> Since the first coming of the Spaniards this southeastern portion of the island has been slowly washed into the sea, and the temple, on a bluff about fifty feet above the sea, as shown on the plan of Le Plongeon, has lost its eastern wall and part of the room.

On the mainland opposite this point are the extensive ruins, now called El Meco, which have been visited by the explorers mentioned above. It is close to the sea at present and, if it were not for the testimony of Bernal Díaz, might well be the Grand Cairo seen by Córdoba. It would be two leagues from the point of Mujeres, but not two leagues back from the coast.

Close to Cape Catoche is the small island of Contoy, about four miles long, low and sandy, upon which no ruins are reported. Cape Catoche is not the mainland now, it being a low sand spit separated from the mainland by a shallow channel a quarter of a mile wide. It is possible that it was connected with the mainland in the early part of the sixteenth century, as the early maps do not represent it as an island. In his itinerary of Córdoba published in the new translation of Bernal Díaz, Maudslay places Grand Cairo on the mainland near Cape Catoche, following the statement

---

quote from the second edition, printed in Madrid in 1732. The first edition is so rare that the date of printing is in dispute. A. Gonzales Barcia was the editor of the second edition. In the preface we read that the original manuscript which served for the first edition was in his library, and the place and date of printing are given as Seville, 1615. Prescott gives this date, but Clavigero puts it as 1614, and we find it in other places as 1612 and 1613. The statement about Mujeres above quoted is in Vol. 1, Bk. 4, p. 349.

<sup>32</sup> Stephens, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 415-417.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Salisbury: Terra Cotta Figures from Isla Mujeres, Northeast Coast of Yucatan, with illustrations, *Proc. Amer. Antiquarian Soc.*, Worcester, 1878, pp. 32-53. An important paper describing the discoveries of Dr. and Madame Le Plongeon.

<sup>34</sup> W. H. Holmes: Archeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico, *Anthropol. Series Field Columbian Museum*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Pt. I, Monuments of Yucatan, pp. 56-63, Chicago, 1895.

<sup>35</sup> Paper cited in footnote 33, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Augustus Le Plongeon: Archaeological Communication on Yucatan, *Proc. Amer. Antiquarian Soc.*, Worcester, 1878, p. 57.

of the old chronicler.<sup>37</sup> This portion of Yucatan has escaped the careful investigation of the archeologist. The only explorers who have attempted to examine this region, Arnold and Frost,<sup>38</sup> did not attack the problem of the location of Grand Cairo. This portion of the coast is shrouded with a dense tropical forest which comes to the very edge of the sea. The remains of ancient settlements lie in an almost impenetrable jungle, and many ruined buildings have been reported, but no group has yet been discovered deserving the name Grand Cairo. A Spanish settlement was made here in early times, and the ruins of the church were reported by Stephens, who, however, did not visit it. It was examined by Arnold and Frost about ten years ago and is near the very spot where Grand Cairo should be located. So far as archeology is concerned, it is seen that the evidence is conflicting. With an exhaustive archeological survey of this region should go a careful examination of the physical changes which have taken place along this coast during four centuries.

#### CARTOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

Of the earliest maps which we possess showing the coast of Yucatan that published by Apianus, printed in Venice in 1520, is the oldest. Mujeres is represented under the name *p: de magieles*.<sup>39</sup> In 1524 it is shown on a map as *y. de mueres*;<sup>40</sup> in 1527 it appears as *y: de mujeres*;<sup>41</sup> in the map of Ribero of 1529 it is given as *d'mugeres*,<sup>42</sup> and in the chart of Alonzo de Santa Cruz, made about the year 1538, it is spelled *ya. de mugeres*.<sup>43</sup> Between Mujeres and Contoy is an island now known as Isla Blanca. On both the Ribero and Santa Cruz maps Contoy is placed well south of Cape Catoche, and between Contoy and Blanca is the name

<sup>37</sup> In the translation of Bernal Díaz by Alfred P. Maudslay (see footnote 18).

The itinerary of the expedition under Córdoba as worked out by Maudslay (Vol. 1, p. lxiii) is:

	Santiago de Cuba
Feb. 8, 1517	Axaruco (Jaruco)
	Gran Cairo, Yucatan (near Cape Catoche)
Sunday, day of San Lázaro	Campeche (San Lázaro)
	Chanpotón (or Potonchan)
(Return Voyage)	Estero de los Lagartos
	Florida
	Los Martires—The Shoals of the Martyrs
	Puerto de Carenas (the modern Havana)

<sup>38</sup> Channing Arnold and F. J. T. Frost: *The American Egypt: A Record of Travel in Yucatan*, New York, 1908. The only part of this work which merits attention is the record of the trip made from Tizimin to the northeast corner of Yucatan and to the islands and adjoining mainland (pp. 118-184).

<sup>39-42</sup> The references to the early maps are taken from the work of Orozco y Berra: *Apuntes para la Historia de la Geografía en México*, published as Vol. 6 of the *Anales del Ministerio de Fomento de la República Mexicana*, Mexico, 1881. This monument of patient industry of the learned *licenciado* must not be overlooked by the student in search of information concerning the early geography of Mexico.

<sup>43</sup> The "El yslario general de todas las yslas del mundo enderesçado a la S. C. C. Magestad del Emperado y Rey nuestro Señor por Alonzo de Sancta Cruz su cosmógrafo mayor" was published for the first time, under the editorship of Fritz R. von Wieser, in Innsbruck, 1908, in honor of the Vienna session of the International Congress of Americanists. The part published of the general work, as noted by the title, is the fourth part, relating to America.

The map of Ribero noted in footnote 42 has been published by Edward L. Stevenson in his portfolio of "Maps Illustrating Early Discovery and Exploration in America," New Brunswick, 1906, in an edition of 28 copies.

Amazonas. This name is suggestive of Mujeres, and it may have been applied in the earlier maps in the same connection. Cape Catoche, on these early maps, is a point on the mainland and not an island.

#### CONCLUSION

The cartographical evidence, beginning with the very earliest map, of 1520, is therefore all in favor of the island of Mujeres. The earliest published statement, as has been said, is that of Gomara, published in 1552. Gomara was never in New Spain, but he was chaplain and secretary of Cortés in later years, hence in intimate contact with the conqueror. It seems strange, however, that the principal royal chronicler of the early part of the sixteenth century, Oviedo, with access to all the material and with the added advantage of having spent many years in the New World, where he talked with many of the participants of these early voyages, does not settle the matter. Indeed, Herrera, who came later as royal chronicler, must have had good reason for ignoring the statement of Gomara that Córdoba went to Cape Catoche after discovering Mujeres. The work of Bernal Díaz, the only eyewitness of the three first expeditions to Yucatan, in 1517, 1518, and 1519, was not begun until after the appearance of the work of Gomara, written, as he says, to correct the errors of that history. It was first printed, and then in an imperfect manner, in 1632. The other works cited, that of Cervantes de Salazar and the "*De Rebus Gestis*," remained in manuscript until recently. These manuscripts and that of Bernal Díaz, as well as others now lost, were undoubtedly consulted by Herrera. We cannot reconcile the distinct statement of Bernal Díaz concerning the location of the temple containing the images resembling women in the vicinity of Cape Catoche with the early christening of the island of Mujeres with that name, as found in all the early maps, the earliest one being printed before Cortés had completed the conquest of Mexico, in 1521. Hence we leave the problem unsolved as to the exact site of the first land-fall in Mexico.